

The Sthala Purana

The Sthala Purana is a section of the Brahmanda Purana. Three disciples of sage Vikanasaru – Maharishis Athri, Bharathwaja and Kashyap wrote this Purana.

A Kshetra is a sacred place which is usually located at the confluence of two or three holy rivers. We often find a temple within its premises. Kshetras radiate positive vibrations and nurture Bhakti within us.

The Sthala Purana mentions all the Punya Kshetras. Great sages visited these Kshetras and stayed there to perform their tapasya. The Sthala Purana narrates all the stories related to each specific Kshetram.

Significance of Pazhaya Seevaram

We consider the Sthala of Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple at Pazhaya Seevaram as a Punya Kshetram. It is located on the holy mountain top of Padmagiri which rises above the confluence of the three rivers Palar (a.k.a Ksheera nadi which originates from Kanchipuram), Seyar (a.k.a Bahu nadi which originates from Mount Durga) and Vegavathi (Saraswati). So we call this confluence as Dakshina Prayag and Thirumukkudal. We believe that it is holier than the Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj because we can see all the three rivers here.

The legend of the Pazhaya Seevaram temple

The 17th chapter of the Brahmanda Puran is called the Padmagiri Mahatmiyam. It narrates the following story in detail:

Vishnu Chittar, a saint wants to perform a long penance because he wants to do the darshan of Lord Vishnu. So he approaches Rishi Mareecha and asks him for the best place to perform the penance. Rishi Mareecha asks Vishnu Chittar to go to the Kshetram of Padmagiri. He says, "O Vishnu Chittar, you will get a glimpse of the fifth avatar of Vishnu, Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy after you perform the penance." And much to Vishnu Chittar's delight, Rishi Mareecha's words prove to be true.

Sage Athri too performs a penance on the mountain top of Padmagiri. He too gets the darshan of Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy. So Sage Athri asks lord Lakshmi Narasimha to stay in Pazhaya Seevaram forever and bless all his devotees.

The Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple at Pazhaya Seevaram

The Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple at Pazhaya Seevaram is located on the Kanchipuram – Chengalpattu State Highway. It is about 16 km from Chengalpattu and 20 km from Kanchipuram. Devotees who visit this temple have to climb 100 steps to reach this temple. The river Palar flows in the north of this temple and the Sri Ayappan Venkatesa Perumal temple lies on the south of this temple. The Sudarshana Hill lies opposite the Padmagiri mountain.

Pazhaya Seevaram was known by the name of Jeeyarpuram and SriPuram earlier. Now it is also known as Satya Varada Kshetram. The idol of Narasimha Swamy and Sri Lakshmi faces west in this temple.

The idol of Sri Narasimha Swamy is six feet in height. The temple priests adorn Him with a dhoti and angavastram. They adorn his consort Sri Lakshmi with a traditional nine-yard sari.

Other shrines within the Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple

There is a separate shrine for Ahobilam, known as Ahobilavalli Thayar next to the main temple here. Another shrine has been created for Andal. Both Ahobilavalli Thayar and Andal are believed to be consorts of Lord Vishnu. Smaller shrines have also been built for great sages like lord Anjaneya, Vishnu Chittar, Nammazhvar and Swami Desikan who performed penance here.

The followers of Shri Gokulnathji (Vallabh Sampradaya) took charge of the temple duties for several decades. A few Gujarati Vaishnav philanthropists who have been residing in Chennai for several generations take care of the administration of the Pazhaya Seevaram temple now.

The festival of Paari Vettai

Initially, the priests addressed the presiding deity at Kanchipuram, lord Varadaraja as Athi Varadar because they had sculpted his idol from the wood of an Athi (Fig) tree. But they submerged the Athi Varadar idol underwater after a few years for some strange reason. And then sculpted a new idol out of granite from a boulder they got from Padmagiri.

We celebrate the festival of Paari Vettai on Mattu Pongal day, the day after Makar Sankranti, as a token of gratitude for this

act of generosity. During this festival, we take Lord Varadaraja on a procession to Pazhaya Seevaram to meet Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy.

Thousands of devotees assemble here for the Brindavana Aradhana. This is a rare occasion in which we get a glimpse of both these local deities at the same time. The temple authorities organize a feast called Vanabhajanam for all these pilgrims after which both deities return to their respective temples.

The essence of the Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy idol

The Sthala Purana states that the Narasimha was so full of fury after slaughtering Hiranyakashipu that nothing, not even Prahalad's devotion and or the pleas of all the other Gods could douse his rage. Even Vishnu could not control the wrath of his avatar. That is when goddess Mahalakshmi came down from Vaikuntha and sat on his left lap. Only she was able to appease the Narasimha's fury.

Our predecessors have built several Narasimha Swamy temples in India to highlight all these aspects of the Narasimha avatar. In most of these temples, the prime focus is on the ferocity of the Narasimha. The idols in such temples have large rounded angry eyes and look ferocious. In a few temples, we can even see the tongue of the Narasimha. Such idols instil awe and fear in our hearts.

But in Pazhaya Seevaram, Narasimha Swamy appears cool and composed. So we call this idol as Shantamoorthy – one in which

the lord has regained his composure. We can see goddess Lakshmi seated on Lord Narasimha's left lap. And we call such temples as Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temples.

The idols, the temples, the history, the geography and the details of these stories may vary slightly but the learning that we get from all these stories is the same – that we should think a hundred times before we invoke the wrath of God. Let's always remember that Shakti (Lakshmi, in this story) alone could subdue the fury of the enraged Narasimha. We too can attain that precious state of equanimity and strike a perfect balance between our outer and inner worlds if we have an abundance of Shakti in our souls.